

# Russia

by Robert W. Ortung

*Capital:* Moscow  
*Population:* 143.5 million  
*GNI/capita, PPP:* US\$24,280

Source: The data above are drawn from the World Bank's *World Development Indicators 2015*.

Nations in Transit Ratings and Averaged Scores

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Electoral Process	6.25	6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75
Civil Society	5.00	5.25	5.50	5.75	5.75	5.50	5.25	5.50	5.75	6.00
Independent Media	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.50
National Democratic Governance	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.75
Local Democratic Governance	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25
Judicial Framework and Independence	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.50	5.50	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25
Corruption	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.75	6.75
Democracy Score	5.75	5.86	5.96	6.11	6.14	6.18	6.18	6.21	6.29	6.46

NOTE: The ratings reflect the consensus of Freedom House, its academic advisers, and the author(s) of this report. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author(s). The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest. The Democracy Score is an average of ratings for the categories tracked in a given year.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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President Vladimir Putin's decisions in 2014 to seize Crimea, invade eastern Ukraine, and deepen political repression at home can all be attributed, at least in part, to his fear of losing power after 15 years as Russia's paramount leader. The Kremlin needed to marshal public support while distracting attention from growing economic problems and preventing any emulation of Ukraine's protest and reform movement.

Russia's state-controlled media contributed to the effort by exploiting Russian memories of the Soviet Union's World War II victory, smearing the new government in Ukraine as a "fascist junta," and blaming the collapse of former Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych's administration on meddling by the United States and other Western powers. To ensure that these assertions remained unchallenged, the authorities increased their harassment of Russia's dwindling independent media outlets and began blocking access to some of the most critical internet sites.

The government also suppressed dissent through new or existing legislation. It once again rewrote the parliamentary electoral law and deployed regional vetting procedures so that all 30 gubernatorial elections held in 2014 went to the Kremlin's handpicked candidates. Similarly, the authorities used the laws on "extremism" and "foreign agents" to harass and intimidate the country's civil society sector. Separately, Putin pushed through a law that abolished Russia's top commercial court, the country's most respected judicial body, and merged its responsibilities into the Supreme Court, making it easier for politicians to use the judiciary to pursue their personal economic interests.

At the end of the year, Russia was more isolated on the international stage. The United States and European Union had imposed sanctions in response to the aggression in Ukraine, and Putin's countersanctions on European goods led to increasing food prices. The domestic economy was also weakened by inefficient state-controlled corporations and low global oil prices, limiting the government's ability to buy popular support with higher living standards. Nevertheless, the president and his closest allies continued to benefit materially from a system defined by lack of accountability to the public and an absence of institutional checks and balances.

**National Democratic Governance.** The Kremlin's radical moves to invade Ukraine and annex Crimea in 2014 reflected the growing opacity and centralization of decision-making in the Russian government. The executive branch dominated the system, with few formal checks on its power. The security services and an informal network of personal connections operated behind the scenes, arguably

carrying more weight than public, civilian institutions. The results of this style of governance included an unacknowledged war, international isolation, and a deteriorating fiscal and economic situation. *Russia's rating for national democratic governance declines from 6.50 to 6.75.*

**Electoral Process.** Apparently concerned that the ruling United Russia party would not win the 2016 parliamentary elections under the current proportional-representation voting method, the Kremlin again changed the electoral law in 2014 to restore a mixed system in which half the seats are filled through single-member district races. The regional elections held in September were among the most fixed in post-Soviet Russian history: Every Kremlin-favored gubernatorial candidate won, demonstrating the effectiveness of the registration and nomination “filters” that kept serious opposition candidates off the ballot. Given the tightly controlled regional elections and further efforts to manipulate the electoral law in the government’s favor, *Russia's rating for electoral process remains unchanged at 6.75.*

**Civil Society.** After intermittently enforcing the 2012 law that required nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to register themselves as “foreign agents” if they received foreign funding and engaged in vaguely defined “political activities,” the Justice Ministry in 2014 began branding groups with the label without their consent. The authorities also used laws against “extremism” to crack down on groups investigating the deaths of Russian soldiers in eastern Ukraine; the Russian government maintained throughout the year, despite ample evidence to the contrary, that none of its military personnel were active across the border. At the same time, the courts continued to harass dissident leaders with time-consuming criminal charges and issued prison sentences for the remaining defendants in a case related to the Bolotnoye Square protests of 2012. Due to the regime’s increased persecution of independent organizations and its efforts to remove the most effective members of civil society from active public life, *Russia's rating for civil society declines from 5.75 to 6.00.*

**Independent Media.** Among other attacks on Russia’s remaining independent media in 2014, Dozhd TV was dropped from cable providers under government pressure, and new legislation prohibited the selling of advertising by broadcasters that charge viewers for their programming, depriving Dozhd and many small regional stations of needed income. Another new law limited foreign ownership of media outlets to 20 percent, targeting the independent newspaper *Vedomosti* in particular. The authorities also blocked access to key opposition websites and imposed onerous new legal restrictions on bloggers. Given these more hostile conditions, *Russia's rating for independent media declines from 6.25 to 6.50.*

**Local Democratic Governance.** The situation of municipal governments deteriorated further as they lost power and resources to federal and regional authorities. Municipalities have long suffered from a lack of guaranteed or

autonomous funding to handle their extensive responsibilities, and their financial base continued to shrink in 2014. Even though the public favors direct mayoral elections, the authorities have steadily reduced the number of such elections in the country's most important regions. *Russia's rating for local democratic governance declines from 6.00 to 6.25.*

**Judicial Framework and Independence.** The Kremlin continued to use Russia's courts to suppress political opposition in 2014, most prominently through a series of legal actions against anticorruption activist and politician Aleksey Navalny. Putin also merged the respected commercial courts into the Supreme Court system, compromising one of the last centers of relative impartiality in the judiciary. A court in The Hague ruled against Russia regarding the government's 2004 seizure of the Yukos oil company, requiring it to pay Yukos stockholders \$50 billion in compensation for the illegal transfer of assets to state-owned Rosneft, but it remained unclear whether Moscow would comply. Given the increased politicization and decreased autonomy of the courts in 2014, *Russia's rating for judicial framework and independence declines from 6.00 to 6.25.*

**Corruption.** The Russian president and his inner circle manipulate the authoritarian system to direct greater personal wealth to themselves and other loyalists. The authorities pursue corruption charges only selectively, to discipline wayward elites and defuse potential opposition in society. U.S. and European sanctions sought to demonstrate the personalized nature of corruption around Putin by specifically targeting his close associates and their enterprises. The September arrest of wealthy businessman Vladimir Yevtushenkov demonstrated that the authorities could target even government-friendly figures and take their assets, in this case the Bashneft oil company. *Russia's rating for corruption remains unchanged at 6.75.*

**Outlook for 2015.** Putin used the seizure of Crimea as a "short, victorious war" to boost his popularity in 2014, and the related fighting in eastern Ukraine has helped to destabilize the new, European-oriented government in Kyiv. However, the conflict threatens to drag Russia into a prolonged and damaging confrontation with the democratic powers. Since Putin now relies on foreign military successes to support his hold on office, he is unlikely to retreat from currently occupied Ukrainian territory and may engage in further aggression. As ties with Europe deteriorate, Russia will become increasingly dependent on authoritarian China.

The ailing economy and diversion of government spending from social support to weapons and soldiers could provoke more protests. In order to maintain control, the Kremlin will resort to increasingly repressive measures in the electoral system, the media, civil society, and the judiciary. While a palace coup or street revolution seem unlikely, a sudden crisis that breaks the regime in its current form cannot be ruled out.

# MAIN REPORT

## National Democratic Governance

2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
6.00	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.75

In a 20 November 2014 speech to Russia's Security Council, President Vladimir Putin stressed the need to combat "extremism," which he associated with a wave of recent "color revolutions" in other countries, and pledged to do everything necessary to prevent something similar from happening in Russia.<sup>1</sup> The statement was in part a reference to the February collapse of Viktor Yanukovich's corrupt presidency in neighboring Ukraine, after a successful protest movement calling for democratic reform and a European policy orientation. To prevent this movement from serving as a source of emulation for Russians, and to distract public attention from Russia's own economic problems, the Kremlin had seized Crimea through military force, formally annexed it in March in a move that was not recognized internationally, covertly organized and sent troops to fight a "separatist" conflict in eastern Ukraine, and launched a propaganda campaign comparing these steps to the fight against Nazi Germany in World War II, with Kyiv's new leaders tarred as anti-Russian "fascists."

The government's radical and aggressive actions during the year illustrated the extent to which decision-making has been centralized and isolated from public scrutiny.<sup>2</sup> Fifteen years after Putin first took office as Russia's president, power is now personalized in a system that gives more weight to informal networks than to formal institutions. Vyacheslav Volodin, first deputy chief of staff of the presidential administration, summarized the thinking of Russia's top leaders in October 2014 with the phrase, "No Putin—No Russia."<sup>3</sup>

Currently, there are no effective institutional checks on the president's power.<sup>4</sup> The cabinet, headed by the prime minister, simply approves decisions made by the president and has no real autonomous authority. There is little civilian oversight of the security services, and both the Federal Security Service (FSB) and the police have grown more powerful as instruments of the Kremlin's effort to quash dissent and marginalize the opposition. Putin is also increasingly promoting personal friends to high positions in the security forces. On 12 May 2014, he appointed Colonel General Viktor Zolotov, one of his former judo sparring partners, to be the first deputy interior minister and commander of the Internal Troops, a 180,000-member police force whose responsibilities include guarding the Kremlin.<sup>5</sup>

The Russian parliament essentially serves as a rubber stamp for the president.<sup>6</sup> On 1 March 2014, for example, the Federation Council—the upper house of the Federal Assembly—voted unanimously to give the president permission to use force in Ukraine, and then revoked the resolution, 153–1, on 25 June, a day after the administration asked it to do so. Both decisions were taken with little or no

debate. Similarly, the State Duma, or lower house, voted on 20 March to approve the annexation of Crimea, 433–1, with three deputies abstaining. The politically relevant legislation that the parliament adopted in 2014 can be divided into three categories: banning activities, including nighttime demonstrations and cursing in the media and arts; constraining democratic institutions, such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); and handing new powers to the executive branch.<sup>7</sup> Though the parliament formally has considerable control over the budget, it does not exercise this authority.

Although Putin's political dominance was unchallenged during the year, his practical ability to influence events across Russia was limited by its slowing economy, the corrupt bureaucracy, and the need to balance various security and business elites against one another. The inefficient and opaque state apparatus largely failed to meet the complex needs of the population.

Polls by the respected Levada Center regularly showed that more than 80 percent of the population approved of Putin's activities following the annexation of Crimea.<sup>8</sup> However, these numbers cannot be taken at face value given the repressive conditions in the country. Rather than simply measuring the leader's popularity, the figures also show the effects of media censorship, the elimination of opposition politicians from the public sphere, and even emigration of Russians from many sectors of society who are dissatisfied with the incumbent authorities. It is notable that Putin has demonstrably lied to the public about his goals and actions, for instance by initially denying that Russian troops were involved in the "secession" of Crimea from Ukraine.<sup>9</sup>

Russia's extensive reliance on state-controlled corporations had brought economic growth close to zero by the beginning of 2014. These corporations typically seek out additional support from the state rather than working to modernize or increase efficiency.<sup>10</sup> Over the course of the year, international sanctions linked to the conflict in Ukraine and a large drop in global oil prices further undermined Russia's hydrocarbon-based economy. The downturn threatened to erode Russians' standard of living; most alarming to the population was an increase in food prices. In addition, the ruble lost nearly half its value against the euro and dollar during the year, considerably weakening the ability of Russian consumers to buy imported goods.

The sanctions put in place by the European Union (EU), the United States, and other democratic countries reflected the sharp deterioration in relations caused by Russia's aggression in Ukraine. Russia's membership in the Group of 8 was suspended, and the sanctions were imposed in several rounds on targets including Putin's richest and closest personal allies, individual officials linked to the seizure of Crimea, and key companies in the Russian financial and energy sectors. In response, the Russian government blocked food imports to Russia from the EU and United States, raising another obstacle for Russian consumers. The Kremlin also attempted to strengthen trade with China, but the large energy deals it struck did not address near-term problems, and many analysts saw them as disadvantageous to Russia. Even as Russia's isolation deepened and its revenues declined, the government ramped up spending on foreign propaganda: The budget for 2015 included a 40

percent increase for the international television station RT and a 2.5-fold increase for the Rossiya Segodnya (Russia Today) news agency and its various websites.<sup>11</sup>

### Electoral Process

2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
6.25	6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75

Elections in Russia do not serve the purpose of democratically selecting the country's national or regional leaders. The apparent openings of past years, such as the restoration of direct gubernatorial elections in 2012 and opposition leader Aleksey Navalny's ability to run for mayor of Moscow in 2013, were effectively snuffed out in 2014, as the authorities worked hard to ensure not only that their candidates won office in regional elections, but that they faced no genuine opposition challengers.

On 24 February, Putin signed into law a new electoral system for Russia's 450-seat State Duma.<sup>12</sup> The act restored an earlier system whereby half of the seats are filled through nationwide proportional representation and half through races in single-member districts. The existing method, in place since the 2007 polls, elected all members through proportional representation. The ruling United Russia party had lost ground under this system in 2011, taking just 49 percent of the vote and 238 seats despite media bias, abuse of state resources, and electoral fraud in its favor. However, the exclusion of true opposition parties meant that the remaining seats went to other loyalist factions: the Communist Party (92), A Just Russia (64), and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (56). Parties must win at least 5 percent of the national vote to enter the parliament through proportional representation. While the new law is neither more nor less democratic than the old one, the frequent changes to the electoral framework indicate a broader effort by the government to manipulate the system and ensure victory for its chosen candidates. Among other changes in recent years, the State Duma's term was increased in 2008 from four to five years, beginning with the 2011 elections.

The 170-seat Federation Council is not elected. Two members are appointed by each of the 85 regions, with one chosen by the executive and one by the legislature. (This total includes the occupied Ukrainian territories of Crimea and Sevastopol.)

Beginning in 2015, Russian voters in municipal elections will have the option of voting "against all," according to a law Putin signed on 4 June.<sup>13</sup> While all Russian ballots previously had such an option, it was removed in 2006 at the urging of United Russia deputies.<sup>14</sup> Initial versions of the bill sought to restore the "against all" column for federal and regional elections as well, but those provisions were rejected. Proponents of the option argued that it would increase voter turnout, allowing citizens to express disapproval of all officially approved candidates when there are no desirable alternatives on the ballot.

Under a 2013 law, several regions have chosen to abolish direct gubernatorial elections, instead adopting an arrangement in which the regional legislature selects a governor from three nominees submitted by the president. Kabardino-Balkaria

did so on 3 April 2014, joining the nearby republics of Dagestan, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, and Karachayevo-Cherkessiya, which had opted out of direct elections the previous year. One local legislator explained that the move was necessary to prevent insurgents from using elections to destabilize the situation in the North Caucasus,<sup>15</sup> echoing Putin's previous warnings that gubernatorial voting in the region could lead to ethnic violence. Direct gubernatorial elections had just been restored in 2012, after being abolished nationwide in 2004. In November and December 2014, three energy-rich districts in western Siberia—Nenets Autonomous Okrug, Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, and Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug—also eliminated gubernatorial elections. Similarly, the Kremlin did not allow Crimea and Sevastopol to hold direct elections for their executives following the annexation.

In the September 2014 regional elections, incumbents won all 30 of the gubernatorial contests held, with United Russia nominees accounting for 28 of the victors; one Communist and one independent also won. The polls provided a preview of methods the authorities will likely use to shape the outcome of the 2016 State Duma elections. The strict rules for registering candidates and party lists helped the authorities eliminate all serious opposition contenders, allowing their preferred candidates to run against so-called “technical candidates” who had no chance of winning.<sup>16</sup> The most effective means of removing undesirable candidates was through various “filters” set by each region, requiring candidates for governor to secure the support of between 5 and 10 percent of local elected officials to get on the ballot. In practice, nominal opposition candidates can register only with the support of the authorities. In these conditions, many members of the opposition did not even try to run in 2014.<sup>17</sup> Among the gubernatorial candidates eliminated from competition by means of the filters were former Russian vice president Aleksandr Rutskoy in Kursk and State Duma member Oksana Dmitriyeva in St. Petersburg. Of the 30 governors' elections, only 11 were held on schedule, after the completion of a full term. The others were held early, typically through tactical resignations by the incumbents, in order to overcome unprepared opposition forces and take advantage of the president's high approval ratings before economic problems became more acute.<sup>18</sup>

These rules and maneuvers led to extremely lopsided victories for the incumbents. The winners in 15 governors' races took more than 80 percent of the vote.<sup>19</sup> In no region did the winning candidate garner less than 50 percent in the first round, which would have necessitated a runoff. In the last elections held in these 30 regions, in the years 2000–04, runoffs had to be held in 17 cases.<sup>20</sup> Pro-Kremlin candidates also dominated the regional legislative elections in 2014.

Given the lack of real competition, turnout figures for the regional elections were generally low; for the Moscow City Duma, the rate was 21 percent, the lowest since the creation of the body in 1993. Some members of the opposition promoted a boycott of the elections, while the media paid little attention to the voting.<sup>21</sup> Watchdog organizations like Golos were illegally prevented from monitoring elections in Chelyabinsk, Samara, and Bashkortostan, and blocked from many precincts in the regions of Nizhny Novgorod and Moscow as well.<sup>22</sup> The authorities have effectively pushed most people out of the political process. According to the



Levada Center, 77 percent of Russians do not want to participate in politics, even at the city level.<sup>23</sup> Such apathy serves the Kremlin purpose of monopolizing public life and demobilizing the population.

The requirements for party registration were eased in 2012, and Russia now boasts dozens of political parties. However, most have little chance of ever winning an election. The Ministry of Justice refused to register Navalny's Party of Progress during 2014, as legal battles and disputes over technicalities hampered its attempts to prove the establishment of branch offices in at least half of the country's regions, as required by the law on political parties.<sup>24</sup>

### Civil Society

2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
5.00	5.25	5.50	5.75	5.75	5.50	5.25	5.50	5.75	6.00

Russia's civil society organizations continue to struggle against a political elite that insists on suppressing any alternative voices or potential opposition. The Kremlin intensified its crackdown in 2014, and while resilient, experienced groups like Golos, Memorial, and the Soldiers' Mothers Committees were able to withstand the onslaught of new regulations and harassment, few new groups rose up to participate in civic life. Estimates suggest that there are several thousand NGOs pursuing a range of activities in Russia. However, many have little visibility inside the country because, given the pressure from the authorities, their leaders fear communicating with the broader population about their work.<sup>25</sup>

The state uses legal tools to harass NGOs. On 4 February 2014, Putin signed a law that increased the penalties for "extremism."<sup>26</sup> It doubled the minimum prison term for inciting hatred to four years, and tripled the minimum fine to 300,000 rubles (\$4,800); it also increased the maximum prison term for establishing an extremist organization to six years, and raised the fine to 500,000 rubles. As in the existing laws, the definition of "extremism" remained so vague that the authorities can essentially apply the label to anyone they choose.

A law enacted in 2012 required all organizations receiving foreign funding and involved in vaguely defined "political activities" to register as "foreign agents" with the Justice Ministry. After NGOs refused to register voluntarily and episodic efforts to compel them made little progress, Putin on 4 June 2014 signed a law allowing the Justice Ministry to declare NGOs foreign agents at its discretion.<sup>27</sup> At year's end, the Justice Ministry listed some 30 organizations as foreign agents on its website, including Golos, the PIR Center, Agora, Memorial, Soldiers' Mothers Committee of St. Petersburg, the Institute for the Development of Freedom of Information, Public Verdict, and other groups that are less well known.<sup>28</sup> To remove themselves from the list, NGOs must appeal the decision and pass a snap inspection, according to a procedure set by the Justice Ministry.<sup>29</sup> On 12 November a Murmansk court declared the Humanist Youth Movement a foreign agent even though the Justice Ministry had found no problems with it. This was reportedly the first instance in

which the Justice Ministry opposed the prosecutor in court over such a case.<sup>30</sup> As the government continued to deny that the Russian military was fighting in eastern Ukraine, mothers, journalists, and politicians who sought to find out why Russian soldiers were dying there faced official obstruction and accusations of serving as a “fifth column.” Despite Kremlin efforts to obfuscate the facts, civil society and independent media worked hand in hand to expose the truth. An investigation by RBC, a popular news site, found that most of the soldiers killed, wounded, or missing in Ukraine came from five airborne units,<sup>31</sup> and a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) crew in Astrakhan was attacked in September as it tried to report on the soldiers’ deaths.<sup>32</sup> Pskov politician and journalist Lev Shlosberg was assaulted in August after publishing information about paratroopers from his hometown who died in Ukraine.<sup>33</sup>

The Justice Ministry branded the St. Petersburg Soldiers’ Mothers Committee a “foreign agent” after it started drawing attention to soldiers’ deaths in Ukraine. Similarly, police arrested Ludmila Bogatenkova, the 73-year-old head of a regional Soldiers’ Mothers Committee in Budyonnovsk, and charged her with “large-scale fraud” on 17 October after her group identified at least 100 soldiers who had been killed.<sup>34</sup> Even after a detention center refused to admit Bogatenkova because she was in poor health, the police held her for two additional days. Other activists have set up Facebook sites to track “Cargo 200,” a code word for bodies returning from war.<sup>35</sup> A “March for Peace” on 21 September attracted about 20,000 people in Moscow, with parallel protests against the Russian intervention held in other cities, demonstrating that a core group of antiwar activists remained engaged.<sup>36</sup>

The crackdown on NGOs and opponents of Russian military aggression was part of a larger effort to suppress dissent. In 2014, the authorities sentenced the last defendants in a case focused on participants in an opposition protest in Moscow’s Bolotnoye Square on 6 May 2012, the day before Putin was inaugurated for a third term as president. Of the 32 individuals whom the Investigative Committee charged in connection with the case, 15 were sentenced to between 2.5 and 4.5 years in prison, one was sent to forced psychiatric treatment, 14 were amnestied or otherwise released, one was under house arrest, and one escaped to Georgia.<sup>37</sup> Most prominently, on 24 July the court sentenced Left Front leader Sergey Udaltsov and his colleague Leonid Razvozhayev to 4.5 years in prison for supposedly organizing mass riots.<sup>38</sup> When the court handed down seven jail terms and one suspended sentence on 24 February,<sup>39</sup> protests led to the arrest of some 200 people.

Economic problems are also leading to unrest. The number of labor protests in the regions focused on unpaid salaries is increasing.<sup>40</sup> Among the participants are miners, workers in metals plants, and public-sector employees. Most often, the actions are spontaneous and do not include organization by unions or parties. Such protests occur at a rate of approximately 1.1 per working day across the country. During 2010–13, when the economy was performing better, these strikes were rare.

In addition to punishing protesters with existing laws in 2014, the government passed new legislation to further curtail freedom of assembly. On 6 October, Putin signed a law banning protests between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m., effectively prohibiting—

among other things—long-term encampments like those associated with Ukraine’s Euromaidan movement.<sup>41</sup>

#### Independent Media

2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
6.00	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.50

Media freedom was one of the main casualties of Putin’s decision to invade Ukraine. The Kremlin filled Russia’s dominant state-controlled television broadcasts with an alternative reality to convince the Russian population that a “fascist junta” had taken power in Kyiv with the backing of the Americans and that it was necessary for Russia to respond. Any news that contradicted this narrative was kept off the airwaves, as was accurate reporting on Russia’s domestic situation.<sup>42</sup> Only the dwindling independent media asked basic questions about Russian involvement in Ukraine and tried to investigate soldiers’ deaths.<sup>43</sup> The most prominent examples of such outlets are Ekho Moskv, *Vedomosti*, *Novaya Vremya*, *Novaya Gazeta*, TV Dozhd, *Slon*, RBC, *Russkiy Zhurnal*, and Colta.ru.

Over the course of the year, the parliament adopted multiple laws designed to constrain critical media. A law promulgated on 25 July banned advertising on satellite and cable channels with paid subscriptions, meaning Dozhd and more than 100 independent regional broadcasters would lose a crucial source of revenue when the law took effect at the beginning of 2015.<sup>44</sup> The measure was widely criticized, and in late 2014 the government said it was considering amendments that would ease the ban. About 20 percent of Russia’s television audience uses cable and satellite services, which often provide the best sources of local news. At the end of the year, the independent Tomsk TV-2 ceased terrestrial broadcasting after the local state-owned transmission center canceled its contract, though it would reportedly remain available via cable. TV-2 employees said the decision was politically motivated.<sup>45</sup>

On 15 October, Putin signed a law limiting foreign ownership in Russian media enterprises to 20 percent stakes.<sup>46</sup> Outlets were given until 1 January 2017 to bring their ownership structures into compliance. The new law significantly tightened the existing regulations, which stipulated that foreign citizens were banned from owning newspapers and magazines with a circulation of more than one million subscribers, or owning more than 50 percent of terrestrial broadcasters reaching areas where more than half the population of Russia lives.<sup>47</sup> The changes threatened to further reduce the number of independent voices in the Russian media market, forcing changes in particular at *Vedomosti*—a respected business newspaper co-owned by Finland’s Sanoma, Britain’s *Financial Times*, and U.S.-based News Corporation—and the Russian edition of *Forbes* magazine, owned by Germany’s Axel Springer group.<sup>48</sup> The law will also affect numerous broadcasters in Russia, such as the Disney Channel, and a wide variety of popular magazines.

On 5 November, Putin signed legislation that adjusted rules requiring foreigners investing in publications of “strategic importance” to secure approval

from a government commission.<sup>49</sup> Such publications were defined as those that produce more than 15 million copies per year if they are published two or more times a week; 2.5 million copies a year if they appear weekly, once in two weeks, or once in three weeks; 700,000 copies if they are issued monthly; and 300,000 if quarterly or less frequently. The previous rule had simply applied to print media that produced at least 1 million copies a year.

Under a law signed in May, bloggers whose sites receive more than 3,000 visitors a day had to register with Roskomnadzor as a media outlet.<sup>50</sup> The law also required internet companies to store user data for six months and supply it to law enforcement agencies upon request, though the wording is vague and there is no apparent mechanism to enforce it.<sup>51</sup> However, the clear intention of the legislation was to limit the ability of bloggers to write what they please.<sup>52</sup>

Similarly, on 31 July, the Russian government forced all Wi-Fi providers in public spaces to register the identity of users before giving them access to the internet, and then save this information for six months.<sup>53</sup> Another law promulgated that month required companies working in Russia to store the personal data of Russian citizens on servers located in Russia.<sup>54</sup> The deadline for compliance remained unclear at year's end, but the rule threatened the operations of companies like Facebook, Twitter, and Google in Russia. Toward the end of 2014, Roskomnadzor requested that Facebook and Twitter remove information promoting a pro-Navalny demonstration planned for 15 January 2015. Ultimately both companies decided to leave the information on their sites,<sup>55</sup> though Facebook at first acceded to the authorities' censorship demand.<sup>56</sup>

Beyond legal harassment, the authorities have used a variety of other tools to disrupt the operations of independent outlets. In January, with apparent encouragement from the Kremlin, cable and satellite providers across the country dropped Dozhd TV from their services. The moves initially cost the station about 80 percent of its audience, since it was forced to rely largely on internet broadcasts.<sup>57</sup> In mid-October, Dozhd's landlord evicted the station from its studio, giving it a deadline of 15 November even though its new studio would not be ready until late January 2015. However, the outlet survived by broadcasting from alternate sites and raising money through crowdsourcing and subscriptions.<sup>58</sup> By the end of the year, Dozhd was attracting about 12 million viewers through broadcasts online, with small regional cable companies, and in Ukraine.<sup>59</sup>

The radio station Ekho Moskvy and its website, which disseminate a wide range of views from across the political spectrum, faced a variety of challenges from the authorities during 2014, but editor in chief Aleksey Venediktov managed to keep his job.<sup>60</sup> In February, state-controlled Gazprom Media, which owns 66 percent of the station, appointed Yekaterina Pavlova, who had a history of working in state media, as the new director, replacing Yuriy Fedutinov, a close ally of Venediktov. Pavlova then resigned in October, and Mikhail Dyomin, who had previously handled public relations for the Sochi Olympics, was later named to replace her.<sup>61</sup> In November, Gazprom Media head Mikhail Lesin ordered the firing of host Aleksandr Plyushchev because of a tweet he posted about the death of Kremlin

chief of staff Sergey Ivanov's son. Venediktov rejected the order as illegal, and Lesin ultimately withdrew it, though Plyushchev was suspended until mid-January 2015.<sup>62</sup> Plyushchev had earlier earned Ekho Moskvyy a warning from Roskomnadzor for a show with the *Los Angeles Times*' Sergei Loiko and Dozhd's Timur Olevskiy in which they discussed the battle for the Donetsk airport in Ukraine. The regulator claimed that the broadcast contained "information justifying war crimes."<sup>63</sup> Lesin himself resigned in December; he had reportedly come into conflict with many of the other state media leaders,<sup>64</sup> and was facing scrutiny from U.S. authorities on how he had purchased a number of multimillion-dollar properties in California.<sup>65</sup>

As many of the restrictive laws passed in 2014 indicated, silencing online criticism has become one of the regime's top priorities since social media were used to organize demonstrations in 2011–12. Explaining current Kremlin thinking, Putin on 24 April described the internet as a "special project created by the CIA" that "is developing accordingly."<sup>66</sup> On 13 March, the prosecutor general asked Roskomnadzor to block four popular opposition websites: *Yezhednevny Zhurnal* (Ej.ru), Grani.ru, Kasparov.ru, and Navalny's blog.<sup>67</sup> A court upheld the move in May.<sup>68</sup> In September, the government blocked the site Compromat.ru, which *Vedomosti* described as one of the most famous on the internet, though it is often accused of publishing incorrect information.<sup>69</sup>

Unlike Dozhd and Ekho Moskvyy, the news site Lenta.ru succumbed to government pressure during the year. In March, Roskomnadzor accused it of extremism for publishing a link to an interview with Dmytro Yarosh, a member of the far-right Ukrainian nationalist group Pravy Sektor (Right Sector). Billionaire businessman Aleksandr Mamut, owner of Lenta.ru's parent company, fired chief editor Galina Timchenko, who had turned the site into a widely read and respected news source.<sup>70</sup> At least 39 staff members then resigned in protest after supporting her in an open letter posted on the site. It declared: "The tragedy is not that we have nowhere to work. The tragedy is that you, apparently, have nothing more to read."<sup>71</sup> Following the shakeup, the site adopted a pro-Kremlin line under new management. In October Timchenko set up a new site based in Latvia (Meduza.io), claiming that it was no longer possible for independent media to survive in Russia.<sup>72</sup>

Pavel Durov, founder and chief executive of the social-networking site VKontakte, also fled abroad. Because he would not give information about Russian oppositionists and Ukrainian protesters to the FSB, he was forced to resign in April. Mail.ru, owned by Kremlin-friendly businessman Alisher Usmanov, subsequently acquired full control of the company. In the past, Vkontakte provided a platform for freewheeling discussions and was used to help organize protest activities.<sup>73</sup> Usmanov now controls a significant part of the Russian internet; Mail.ru is also the owner of Odnoklassniki, Russia's other leading social network.<sup>74</sup>

In one case, the censors did not achieve their aim. In October 2013, Roskomnadzor won a court order to close Rosbalt, a major news agency, on the grounds that its website included videos with obscene language. However, the site was able to continue operating through 2014 because, in legal terms, it represented multiple media outlets, at least one of which still had a valid license.<sup>75</sup>

Russia remains a dangerous place to practice journalism. On 1 August, Kabardian journalist and human rights activist Timur Kuashev was found dead near Nalchik, allegedly poisoned.<sup>76</sup> He was a well-known reporter who had written for regional outlets including *DOSH*, *Kavkazsky Uzel*, and *Kavkazskaya Politika*. He had hoped to run in the September gubernatorial elections as a candidate of the liberal party Yabloko and was a Salafist Muslim.<sup>77</sup> The local investigative committee opened a murder investigation, but it yielded no immediate results.<sup>78</sup> Before his death, Kuashev reported receiving threats from the police for his activities and postings on his blog.<sup>79</sup> Separately, on 9 June a Russian court convicted a group of Chechens and a former police officer of killing *Novaya Gazeta* journalist Anna Politkovskaya in 2006. Another former police officer had previously been sentenced.<sup>80</sup> Rather than bringing the case to a conclusion, however, the convictions failed to address the question of who ordered the killing and why.

Local Democratic Governance

2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25

The main problem for local governments in Russia is their lack of autonomous power and funding. Because the overall political system is both centralized and personalized, authority and resources generally flow downward, first from the president to the regional governors, then to the mayors at the bottom of the hierarchy. Local governments have little ability to raise money on their own through taxes and fees, relying heavily on subsidies from the regional and federal governments. As a result, many Russian cities simply do not have the funds to cope with the responsibilities assigned to them, and an ongoing process of municipal reform continued to shift resources and decision-making responsibility away from local governments in 2014.

In April, the State Duma began considering a bill to end direct mayoral and council elections in 67 large cities, including 56 regional capitals.<sup>81</sup> United Russia ensured the bill's passage in the first of three readings, but most of the usually compliant "opposition" deputies voted against it.<sup>82</sup> Governors, who often clash with mayors over the distribution of tax revenue, would be the main beneficiaries if all mayoral elections were canceled.<sup>83</sup> The bill had not advanced further by year's end.

The federal legislation may have stalled because electing mayors remains popular. A Levada Center poll released in May showed that 77 percent of the population supported direct elections of city executives.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, several regions have already eliminated mayoral elections on their own in recent years. In September, the Samara regional legislature approved a bill backed by the governor to eliminate direct mayoral elections in that region.<sup>85</sup> The governor smoothed the transition by appointing the incumbent mayor of Samara's capital to the Federation Council.<sup>86</sup> Among other regions, Volgograd eliminated mayor elections in May,<sup>87</sup> Rostov in July,<sup>88</sup> and Dagestan in October.<sup>89</sup>

The autonomy of mayors has also been reduced in recent years through the bifurcation of executive responsibilities, with the mayor performing mainly ceremonial functions and a city manager controlling the budget and administration. The overwhelming majority of municipalities in Russia now operate under such arrangements. The city managers are chosen by the city council, usually for two-year contracts, and are selected from a list of candidates prepared by a commission that includes at least some gubernatorial appointees.<sup>90</sup>

Russia's vertical model of management makes it very difficult for city governments to function effectively. The top-down subordination means that different departments rarely coordinate with one another and often make conflicting plans for the same land.<sup>91</sup>

Advocates of decentralization have faced charges of extremism, which can lead to long jail terms. After a group of activists made plans for an August 2014 rally seeking greater autonomy for Krasnodar Krai, one, Darya Polyudova, was arrested and charged with extremism; two others, Vyacheslav Martynov and Pyotr Lyubchenkov, fled to Ukraine after receiving a summons from the FSB.<sup>92</sup> Polyudova was awaiting trial at year's end, and Memorial declared her a prisoner of conscience on 30 October. The authorities quashed a similar movement in Siberia,<sup>93</sup> where activists sought to win greater powers for their local and regional governments.<sup>94</sup> On 22 July, Putin signed a law that strengthened the criminal penalties for calls to violate the territorial integrity of Russia.<sup>95</sup> Among other things, the law criminalizes expressions of support for returning Crimea to Ukraine, with penalties of up to five years in prison.<sup>96</sup>

In a September decree, Putin disbanded the Ministry for Regional Development.<sup>97</sup> Special ministries had been created in recent years for the North Caucasus, the Far East, and as of March 2014, occupied Crimea, reducing the need for the general ministry. There were also reports during the year that an Arctic ministry would be established.<sup>98</sup> The remaining functions of the Ministry for Regional Development were divided among other Russian ministries. Advocates for the rights of indigenous peoples complained that the president's decree placed such groups under the jurisdiction of the Culture Ministry, which lacks the resources to address the economic needs of these underserved people, who often live in remote locations.

The federal authorities continued to search for effective ways to govern the restive North Caucasus area. In May Putin removed his previous representative to the North Caucasus Federal District, Aleksandr Khloponin, and replaced him with Lieutenant General Sergey Melikov, an Interior Ministry officer and the commander of the Combined Group of Forces in the North Caucasus.<sup>99</sup> Khloponin had focused on economic development, whereas Melikov will emphasize security arrangements. However, as deputy prime minister, Khloponin would monitor the work of the new North Caucasus Affairs Ministry, led by former Krasnoyarsk governor Lev Kuznetsov. Before the Sochi Olympics, Moscow had backed a program promoting tourism in the region to create jobs and limit the impact of the ongoing insurgency, but now the limited federal resources were expected to go to building needed schools and medical facilities.



On 4 December, the day of Putin’s annual address to the parliament, a group of insurgents attacked the Chechen capital and killed 14 police officers before being killed themselves. Putin came to power in 1999 promising to eliminate such attacks, but they have continued sporadically throughout his rule.<sup>100</sup> The latest assault cast further doubt on the effectiveness of the North Caucasus republics’ long-standing reliance on large subsidies from the federal government and repressive policing. After the Grozny attack, Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov threatened to burn down the houses of the perpetrators’ families and expel them from Chechnya, a punishment that would violate Russian law.<sup>101</sup> When human rights activist Igor Kalyapin, head of the Committee Against Torture, criticized those statements, Kadyrov accused him in an Instagram post of collaborating with terrorists.<sup>102</sup>

Judicial Framework and Independence

2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
5.25	5.25	5.25	5.50	5.50	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25

The lack of independent courts leaves Russia’s political opposition vulnerable to constant pressure from the authorities. Activists are forced to defend themselves against what are often blatantly trumped-up charges designed to prevent them from engaging in their public work. As of 30 October 2014, Memorial listed 46 political prisoners in Russia.<sup>103</sup>

The most obvious case of legal harassment as a means of suppressing political activism was the treatment of Navalny during the year. A Moscow court placed him under house arrest in February in connection with an ongoing embezzlement case, and he was denied access to the internet, though he continued to speak out. On 30 December, the court gave him a suspended 3.5-year sentence, but sent his brother to a penal colony, also for 3.5 years. The brothers were convicted of causing financial damage to two companies, even though witnesses at the trial said that the firms had not suffered losses from their actions.<sup>104</sup> The incarceration of Navalny’s brother was widely viewed as an attempt to deter the activist from further criticism of the Kremlin.<sup>105</sup> The court moved up the sentencing from 15 January to just before the New Year holiday in an apparent effort to avoid protests that were already being organized to coincide with the hearing.<sup>106</sup> An editorial in *Vedomosti* argued that “the most shocking thing was the readiness to sacrifice the long-term interests of Russian society in favor of the short-term political interests of the leaders of the state. It is hard to imagine something more destructive for the legal institutions and judicial system than the next ‘Navalny affair.’”<sup>107</sup>

Russia also illegally detained Ukrainian citizens in 2014. The most prominent, military pilot Nadiya Savchenko, was forcibly taken across the border in July and then required to undergo psychiatric evaluation. She was charged with involvement in the deaths of two Russian journalists in Ukraine and remained in Russian custody at year’s end. Her detention was criticized as a violation of the 5 September Minsk agreement that was supposed to lead to a resolution of the



conflict in eastern Ukraine.<sup>108</sup> Savchenko identified Ihor Plotnitsky, leader of the Russian-backed separatist “Lugansk People’s Republic,” as one of her abductors.<sup>109</sup> Another Ukrainian, film director Oleg Sentsov, was arrested in Crimea in May and transferred to Moscow. He had been active in the Automaidan, a group of drivers who gathered their cars in front of corrupt officials’ houses, and opposed the Russian occupation of Crimea. Sentsov’s lawyer claimed that his jailers beat him and threatened him with rape to extract a confession of plotting terrorist acts.<sup>110</sup>

Court reforms in 2014 further eroded what remained of the judiciary’s independence. On 6 February, Putin signed a package of laws that merged the Supreme Arbitration Court, a 70-judge body that led the branch of the judiciary responsible for commercial disputes, into the 120-judge Supreme Court, to create an enlarged Supreme Court with 170 judges.<sup>111</sup> The Supreme Arbitration Court had been widely respected for its relative fairness, and its demise raised questions about the future quality of the commercial court system.<sup>112</sup>

The selection process for the new Supreme Court eliminated many of the allies of former Supreme Arbitration Court chairman Anton Ivanov.<sup>113</sup> Because the outgoing arbitration judges were required to go through a new round of confirmation procedures, most did not make the transition to the Supreme Court.<sup>114</sup> Initially, the special qualification board had difficulty filling the 170 Supreme Court judgeships, particularly for the Judicial Board on Economic Disputes; the court opened in August with just 91 judges overall and only 11 of the 33 judges meant to sit on the new economic board.<sup>115</sup> The head of the board is Oleg Sviridenko, a Moscow commercial court judge who opposed many of Ivanov’s proposals. Vyacheslav Lebedev, who has been chief justice since 1989, remained in place as head of the Supreme Court.

Under the new system, Russia’s commercial court judges will have fewer opportunities to issue guiding interpretations. The result will be “more variability in lower court decisions, undermining any greater uniformity in adjudication.”<sup>116</sup> The general consensus on the merger is that it will block innovative efforts to reform the Russian judicial system, and instead create more opportunities for political leaders to intervene in the judicial process and advance their particular economic interests.

Russian courts faced international censure on 28 July, when the Permanent Court of Arbitration, based in The Hague, ordered the Russian government to pay shareholders of the Yukos oil company \$50 billion for expropriating their assets in 2004.<sup>117</sup> The court found that Russian officials had manipulated the legal system to bankrupt Yukos. Similarly, on 31 July, the European Court of Human Rights awarded the Yukos shareholders \$2.5 billion on the grounds that the Russian state had violated their property rights by bankrupting the company through punitive tax claims.<sup>118</sup> The state oil company Rosneft now owns Yukos’s former assets, and its international activities may be affected by the decisions. However, it will be extremely difficult to enforce the judgments.

On 22 October, Putin signed changes to the criminal procedure code that allow the regular police to press charges for tax fraud even if tax authorities have found no evidence of wrongdoing. In 2011, then president Dmitriy Medvedev had introduced reforms that allowed only the tax authorities to press such claims,

with the aim of reducing the ability of officials to exert arbitrary pressure on private companies.<sup>119</sup> Following Medvedev’s initiative, the number of tax cases dropped significantly. He and members of the business community opposed the return to the old system, but their pleas were unsuccessful.

In October 2014, the European Court of Human Rights began hearing an appeal filed by the NGO Mothers of Beslan, which represents the parents of the 186 children killed in a terrorist hostage-taking incident in September 2004.<sup>120</sup> The activists allege that the Russian authorities’ decision to storm a school captured by the terrorists led to the deaths of the children and some 150 others, and that they could not obtain justice through the Russian court system. Officials have claimed that they had no choice but to intervene because they feared that the gunmen were going to kill their hostages. However, a parliamentary investigation of the tragedy questioned the official account,<sup>121</sup> and the government has not followed up on the report to provide a full accounting of what happened at the school.

Corruption

2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.75	6.75

Corruption is a central feature of the Russian political system, and Putin is a key beneficiary, in terms of both political power and economic gain.<sup>122</sup> Accordingly, the current Kremlin leadership has little interest in fighting graft. Misuse of billions of dollars in public revenue from energy sales and other sources deprives future generations of the infrastructure, schools, and development they will need to compete.<sup>123</sup> According to the World Bank’s Worldwide Governance Indicators, Russia is among the most corrupt countries in the world even though it has a relatively high per capita income.<sup>124</sup> In imposing sanctions on Russia for its invasion of Ukraine in 2014, the U.S. government effectively claimed that Putin was personally involved in corrupt activities through his close associates in the business world, including Gennadiy Timchenko and the brothers Arkadiy and Boris Rotenberg.<sup>125</sup> Russia’s extensive corruption has empowered organized crime groups, which allegedly worked with Russian authorities in the occupation of Crimea and the conflict in eastern Ukraine.<sup>126</sup>

On 16 September, the authorities placed Vladimir Yevtushenkov, then number 15 on the *Forbes* list of the richest Russians, under house arrest and barred him from speaking to anyone besides prosecutors, his lawyers, and close family members. He was accused of money laundering, and on 29 October a court ruled that his holding company, Sistema, had to return the Bashneft oil company to the state because it had been improperly privatized and sold to a previous owner.<sup>127</sup> Yevtushenkov had avoided involvement in politics, and unlike other business magnates, he kept his assets in Russia, but this did not protect him from running afoul of the authorities.<sup>128</sup> The prevailing explanation for the case among observers was that Rosneft head Igor Sechin wanted to gain control of Bashneft to bolster the position

of his company, which had been cut off from U.S. and European financing because of the Ukraine-related sanctions. Regardless of the motivation, Yevtushenkov's arrest again demonstrated that the individuals who control state power in Russia can seize assets arbitrarily.<sup>129</sup> He was eventually released from house arrest on 17 December, though he had been stripped of up to 90 percent of his former wealth.<sup>130</sup>

Since Putin came to power, purported efforts to fight corruption have yielded no progress. For anticorruption measures to be effective, there must be oversight by opposition lawmakers, independent media, and NGOs, as well as adjudication by impartial courts. However, the government has been unwilling to tolerate such autonomous institutions. The result is that corruption continues to worsen even as the country's leaders disingenuously denounce it in their speeches. Official anticorruption efforts typically serve as a means for elite groups inside the state bureaucracy to weaken their enemies, rather than to reduce graft.

Putin introduced the latest plan to fight corruption on 11 April 2014.<sup>131</sup> It required the government to investigate risks for corruption within the judicial system the housing sector, the construction industry, and consumer markets. The plan also called for increased oversight of large-scale infrastructure projects, apparently with the aim of avoiding a repetition of the cost overruns from the 2014 Sochi Olympics as Russia prepares to host soccer's 2018 World Cup. A provision of the plan empowered Russia's various law enforcement agencies to prepare a series of investigative measures, but since the work of these agencies is not made public, it will be difficult to assess their effectiveness.<sup>132</sup>

On 25 November, Putin signed a law seeking to reduce the ability of Russian businesses to take advantage of offshore tax havens.<sup>133</sup> Capital outflows during 2014 reached at least \$200 billion, according to Sergey Shatirov, deputy chairman of the Federation Council Committee for Economic Policy. He noted that anonymously owned offshore companies, in addition to evading taxes, are used to hide criminal activity and the proceeds of corruption.<sup>134</sup> Capital flight, a chronic problem in recent years, is also seen as an indication of lack of confidence in property rights and the rule of law in Russia.

There have long been allegations that Putin is building a giant palace on the Black Sea using ill-gotten wealth. A Reuters investigation found that two close associates of the president had deposited \$48 million into a Swiss bank account associated with the property.<sup>135</sup> According to the investigation, they made the money by selling medical equipment to the Russian government at inflated prices.

With lucrative sectors such as oil and gas production already under their control, Putin's associates have started taking over less obvious industries, such as textbook production. After the authorities removed numerous school textbooks from the country's classrooms in 2014, a publishing company owned by the president's friend Arkadiy Rotenberg was the main beneficiary; its books managed to gain the state's approval, allowing the firm to provide textbooks to Russia's schools with little competition.<sup>136</sup>

The sanctions imposed by the EU and its allies during the year created new opportunities for corruption and insider deals in Russia. For example, when Bank

Rossiia, which has close ties to the Kremlin, was targeted, the authorities began compensating it with new business, including the right to manage financial aspects of the country's wholesale electricity market, bringing in approximately \$100 million in annual commissions.<sup>137</sup> The bank's chairman and largest shareholder is Yuriy Kovalchuk, one of Putin's closest associates.

Foreign companies working in Russia sometimes participate in corrupt practices. In September, the Russia subsidiary of technology firm Hewlett-Packard pleaded guilty in a U.S. court and agreed to pay a \$58.8 million fine for violating the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act by bribing Russian government officials to win large contracts.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Мы видим, к каким трагическим последствиям привела волна так называемых ‘цветных революций,’ какие потрясения испытали и испытывают народы стран, которые прошли через безответственные эксперименты подспудного, а иногда и грубого, как у нас говорят, ‘ломового’ внешнего вмешательства в их жизнь. Для нас это урок и предупреждение, и мы обязаны сделать всё необходимое, чтобы подобное никогда не случилось в России.” [We see the tragic consequences of the wave of so-called ‘color revolutions,’ the turmoil in the countries that have undergone the irresponsible experiments of covert and sometimes blatant interference in their lives. We take this as a lesson and a warning, and we must do everything necessary to ensure this never happens in Russia.] Vladimir Putin, “Заседание Совета Безопасности” [Meeting of the Security Council], Kremlin.ru, 20 November 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/47045>.

<sup>2</sup> Konstantin Gaaze, “Покер для одного” [Poker for one], *Novoye Vremya*, 1 September 2014, <http://www.newtimes.ru/articles/detail/86540>; Shaun Walker, “Inside Putinworld, Where Few Risk Speaking Truth to Power,” *Guardian*, 29 August 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/29/putin-world-kremlin-moscow-power-circle>.

<sup>3</sup> Yekaterina Galochka, “Володин: ‘Есть Путин—есть Россия, нет Путина—нет России’” [Volodin: ‘If there is Putin—there is Russia, no Putin—no Russia], *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, 23 October 2014, <http://www.mk.ru/politics/2014/10/23/volodin-est-putin-est-rossiya-net-putina-net-rossii.html>.

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- <sup>8</sup> “Одобрение деятельности Владимира Путина” [Approval of the activities of Vladimir Putin], Levada Center, <http://www.levada.ru/indeksy>, accessed 7 January 2015.
- <sup>9</sup> At a 4 March press conference, Putin insisted that Russian troops had not been used in the takeover of Crimea, which he firmly attributed to “local self-defense forces.” On 17 April, he said, “Of course, the Russian servicemen did back the Crimean self-defense forces.” See President of Russia, “Vladimir Putin Answered Journalists’ Questions on the Situation in Ukraine,” Kremlin.ru, 4 March 2014, [http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/press\\_conferences/20366](http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/press_conferences/20366); President of Russia, “Direct Line with Vladimir Putin,” Kremlin.ru, 17 April 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20796>.
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